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C O N F I D E N T I A L KUWAIT 001657

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FOR NEA/ARP

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [ECON](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT PRESSURES GOVERNMENT AS AVIATION  
WORKERS STRIKE; GOVERNMENT SHOWS SIGNS OF RESISTANCE

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Alan Misenheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) a  
nd (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: The Kuwaiti Government has departed from its usual practice of backing down to Parliamentary pressure by resisting calls for higher wages for government employees. The GOK was not able to prevent the formation of committees to investigate several former ministers, but ministers were more forceful in responding to accusations during the November 20 parliamentary session than they have been recently. Kuwaitis across the political spectrum increasingly cite the need for stronger national leadership. There is wide speculation that the USG is working with the Government to plan its strategy for dealing with the contentious Parliament, including a possible green light from the U.S. for the Amir to suspend democracy in order to restore political order. An Islamic Constitutional Movement (Kuwait's Muslim Brotherhood) MP and one of Kuwait's prominent liberals recently suggested to PolOff separately that the U.S. should use its influence to spur the Government to "provide direction" for the country. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (U) On November 20, Parliament continued its pressure on the Government by forming committees to investigate scandals relating to the Ministries of Information and Education. Parliament also voted to refer the proposed grillings of the former Islamic Affairs and Oil Ministers to the State Audit Bureau. MPs have accused the Government of trying to hide misdeeds by dropping the two ministers rather than allowing them to be grilled in Parliament, and this latest move is an attempt to embarrass the Government. MPs also attacked the Government for its handling of pay raises for government employees. Popular Action Bloc MP Musallam Al-Barrak and independent Islamist Faisal Al-Mislim made headlines when they rallied striking civil aviation workers on November 19. The aviation workers were demanding higher wages to match increases given to medical workers, oil workers, and especially those working for Kuwait Airlines. MPs called for pay raises for workers in other government sectors. The aviation strike shut down Kuwait International Airport for several hours and resulted in the reported cancellation or suspension of more than 20 international flights. The Ports Authority cancelled a strike that threatened to shut down Kuwait's three commercial ports as well.

¶3. (SBU) The Government responded somewhat more decisively to the challenges posed by Parliament and the striking workers than it has recently. In recent sessions, ministers preferred to avoid arguments. But National Assembly Affairs Minister Faisal Al-Hajji repeatedly stood up and rebutted the accusations of the MPs; and Education Minister Nouriya Al-Sabih also gave a stiff defense against the accusations leveled at her. The Government also held firm in insisting that it would not authorize further pay raises until it completes a study (which it is carrying out with the help of

the World Bank) looking into a rational policy of pay raises.

The Amir broke with his normal practice of remaining aloof from low-level politics and publicly called on the trade unions to wait for the study's findings, which are due in February. The trade unions reacted indignantly at hints of Governmental action against striking workers, but agreed to wait until February; and the Government made an important concession to Parliamentary pressure by rescinding the pay raises it had announced in early November.

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